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SUBJECT: (C) MINISTER SHARAR URGES ACTION ON GUANTANAMO
DETAINEES

Classified By: AMB. RICHARD H. JONES; REASONS 1.5 (B,D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and National Assembly Affairs Sharar told the Ambassador August 2 that Kuwaitis look to the US to ensure due process for Guantanamo detainees (which include 12 Kuwaitis). They discussed the GOK's prospects for cooperation with the newly-elected National Assembly, the issue of the "bidoon" (stateless persons living in Kuwait), and the situation in the region. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador called on Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and National Assembly Affairs Mohammed Dhayfallah al-Sharar August 2, as part of his round of courtesy calls on members of the new Cabinet formed July 15. Pol Chief sat in as notetaker. The meeting was conducted entirely in Arabic.

(C) COOPERATION WITH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

¶3. (C) After congratulating Sharar on his reappointment (he held the same posts in the last Cabinet), the Ambassador asked for his assessment of the new National Assembly elected July 5. Sharar said the results show the people want tangible results instead of "grillings" of Ministers and similar grandstanding. He noted the increase in Independents at the expense of "parties," whether Islamic Constitutional Movement or liberals.

¶4. (C) Sharar said the GOK was preparing a sort of roadmap that it would present to the National Assembly in October, showing priorities, timelines, costs, and any needed legislation. He mentioned the issue of the "bidoon" (stateless persons in Kuwait), saying it needs to be addressed in a balanced way, not necessarily by granting citizenship. In his view, the bidoon, whose number he estimated at 40,000, know they are better off in Kuwait with their present ambiguous status than they would be in their countries of origin: Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq and Iran. He added that some 26,000 bidoon "got their passports" in the past four years.

(C) GUANTANAMO DETAINEES

¶5. (C) Referring to the planned September visit to Washington by Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah, Sharar said Kuwait's alliance with the US is fundamental and needs continual high-level dialogue. He then raised the issue of Kuwaiti detainees at Guantanamo, saying Kuwaiti citizens keep asking what US policy is. He stated that a great country should ensure due process and dispose of cases fairly. In response to his question, the Ambassador said he did not have any new information to share, but was aware that the GOK Ambassador in Washington had discussed the issue with US officials. He noted that we have released some detainees after deciding they were innocent, and highlighted the potentially disastrous consequences of releasing unreformed killers. The Ambassador added that the USG was still developing its position on possible bilateral agreements under which detainees might be repatriated.

(C) IRAQ AND THE REGION

¶6. (C) Sharar asked how things were going in Iraq. The Ambassador replied that public services are improving slowly, and the death of Uday and Qusay has made the population more willing to help us. Bechtel had begun work, and had contracts with Kuwaiti firms. Sharar replied that Kuwaitis feel their country should have a leading role in rebuilding Iraq. They applaud the elimination of Saddam's regime, which posed a danger to the world, and hope to hear news of his capture or death. Sharar assessed that tension had lessened a great deal between Kuwaitis and Iraqis, who are bound by historical ties. The two countries have mutual interests, especially in the economic realm. He said there were plans for a free trade zone on the border, and perhaps for a Kuwaiti trade exhibition in Baghdad. Iraqi businesspeople were buying goods in Kuwait for sale in Iraq, and the GOK was facilitating their movements. The Ambassador suggested that if they consolidated their shipments, it would enable them to share the cost of necessary security for their trucks.

¶7. (C) In reply to Sharar's question, the Ambassador said he

was optimistic about the future of the region overall. He noted the serious efforts to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian agreement. The Minister responded approvingly that this is "the main cause" of Arab disaffection with the US. Resolving that conflict would lead to positive changes in Syria and Lebanon as well, he added. He laughed in agreement when the Ambassador observed that America has two kinds of critics in the Arab World: those who believe we intervene too much and those who don't think we intervene enough.

18. (C) On Iran, Sharar said he has seen many changes there over the years since the Islamic revolution. The population is tired of the mullahs' rule and wants a more open society. The Ambassador noted the benefits of separating religion and state. Sharar replied "that's a point of view," before declaring that persons of all faiths enjoyed freedom under Islamic rule as practiced by the "rightly guided caliphs."

JONES